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*PRESS RELEASE*

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WASHINGTON- The impact of community design and transportation systems on public health has come into the spotlight in recent years, as rising rates of obesity, asthma, and other chronic illnesses have been scientifically linked to urban sprawl.

Recognizing the need for proactive collaboration on this issue, the National Association for County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the American Planning Association (APA) have joined forces to educate local community officials on the link between public health and community design, land-use planning, and transportation.

On April 22-23, 2004, NACCHO and APA sponsored a two-day workshop in Washington that paired together local planners and local public health officials from thirteen jurisdictions. The 13 participating communities were selected from more than 60 communities that applied to attend. NACCHO and APA covered expenses for each participant attending the workshop. In attendance from Albuquerque was Kristine Suozzi from the Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health, and Steve Wheeler, assistant professor in the Community and Regional Planning Program at the University of New Mexico.

“This workshop enhances the opportunity for creating new coalitions and collaborative efforts between health officials, planners and other disciplines for overall improved quality of life,” said the Executive Director of NACCHO, Patrick Libbey in his opening comments.

“As a former local health official, I believe all local health officials need to be better educated about and more involved in land-use decisions that can promote physical activity, prevent injury, improve traffic safety, and improve air and water quality.”

Since 1999, NACCHO and APA have received support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation respectively, to research links between community planning and design and public health issues. This workshop was funded by a grant to NACCHO and APA from the CDC.

The April 2004 workshop was conceived to initiate information sharing among local public health professionals and planning agencies with the aim of influencing current practices and policy change at the local level. Over two days, attendees heard from experts on the state of current practice in public health, planning, and transportation. Each person worked with their respective local

colleague to identify barriers to collaboration and to develop an action plan for substantive collaboration once back at home.

“It was great to work with the planner from my city, county, regional agency,” said a health official in attendance. “It strengthened our relationship and formed a partnership for the future.”

NACCHO and APA will be conducting similar workshops at State Association for County and City Health Officials (SACCHO) meetings throughout the country. For more information about these training opportunities or for more information on this issue in general, go to the following link on NACCHO’s website regarding the built environment and land-use planning: <http://www.naccho.org/project84.cfm>.